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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000332

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA/SPAIN: MORATINOS VISIT CAUSES HARM

REF: A. HAVANA 322

[1](#)B. MADRID 629 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos' high-profile visit to Cuba, which ended April 3, gave a boost to the Cuban regime, at the expense of Cuba's democratic opposition. To the extent that Cuba and Spain have created a Human Rights "mechanism," it does not appear to obligate the Cuban regime to take any action to ease its totalitarian rule, such as releasing political prisoners. Reactions from Cuban civil society have been harsh:

-- Key dissident leaders Oswaldo Paya and Martha Beatriz Roque, as well as the Damas de Blanco, have turned down an April 4 meeting with Javier Sandomingo, who stayed behind after Moratinos and the rest of his delegation departed;

-- These and other dissidents have issued public declarations of their disappointment, emphasizing that this was a lost opportunity to push the regime hard to release political prisoners;

-- Miriam Leyva, a Dama de Blanco and former Cuban MFA official, told COM that the Spanish objective was to lock in existing business ventures, including some debt restructuring, before the inevitable American business onslaught that will accompany a genuine transition.

European representatives sat on the sidelines and watched the Spanish carry on as if there were no EU "common position." One exception was Slovakia, which joined us in organizing a live videoconference between Cuban youth dissidents and veterans of the 1989 "Velvet Revolution." End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The GOC made a big show of the Moratinos visit and featured it as the lead item in their state-controlled media on April 2-3. TV footage highlighted the Spanish delegation visiting the Latin American School of Medicine, touring Havana, sitting with all smiling faces across a negotiating table, and in a presidential reception room. The two principal interlocutors were Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and Vice President Carlos Lage, with the former standing side by side with Moratinos for a joint press

statement on Tuesday afternoon, April 3. Perez Roque went out of his way to emphasize that the two countries met as equals, and showed mutual respect. Moratinos also met Raul Castro, and passed him a handwritten get-well message for Fidel Castro from King Juan Carlos. Raul Castro dressed in civilian clothing for the occasion, a departure from his usual practice.

13. (C) The two sides announced creation of a "Human Rights Mechanism," which will meet yearly and meet yearly. According to Moratinos, any and every issue was on the table. According to Perez Roque, no human rights issues in Cuba have any business being discussed in that forum, since human rights in Cuba are a domestic issue, and the ground rules for Spain/Cuba rapprochement disallow interference in each other's internal affairs. Both sides also agreed that Spain could give bilateral assistance to Cuba, with no political conditions -- which overcomes Fidel Castro's rejection of European Union assistance, dating back to the EU sanctions imposed after Castro's crackdown on dissent in the Spring of 2003.

DISSIDENTS DISSED:

14. (C) The key leaders of the Cuban democratic opposition are disappointed that Moratinos did not meet with them during his visit. All but Cuesta Morua and Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo (each of whom is a one-man dissident organization) turned down Spain's consolation prize offer: A Wednesday afternoon, April 4, meeting with Spanish MFA Latin Americas Director Javier Sandomingo.

-- Oswaldo Paya told us that "If the Spanish want to prop-up the Cuban dictatorship, why don't they just come out and say so; it would be more honest." Paya said the Spanish did not

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contact him in advance of the visit, that the last-minute offer to see Sandomingo was insulting, and that he would not go. He added that he would issue a public statement after the delegation departed.

-- Martha Beatriz Roque (MBR) also told us that she would turn down the consolation prize, as would her associates in the "Assembly to Promote Civil Society," Felix Bonne and Rene Gomez Manzano. MBR commented on the visit as a lost opportunity, although she thought the regime might, next week, release a few prisoners to allow the Spanish to claim credit. Her view was that if they did that, it would be prisoners whose sentences were complete in any case. Finally, MBR said that Sandomingo called her a second time on Wednesday; she responded by inviting him to her house in a personal capacity (remembering their friendship when he was DCM here in the mid-1990s), but under no circumstances would she meet at the Spanish Embassy. The Spanish Ambassador, she added, is a communist, regime sympathizer.

-- Laura Pollan, representative of the "Damas de Blanco," told us she would not meet with Sandomingo after the rest of the delegation departed. On the 30th of March, Pollan had issued a public letter to Moratinos, on behalf of the Damas, urging that he use his visit to press for the release of all political prisoners.

-- Oscar Espinosa Chepe (economist and released Political Prisoner) and his wife, Miriam Leyva (Dama de Blanco, independent journalist, and Former MFA official) told COM and Pol-Econ Counselor that the Spanish visit was all about business. They took the view that the Spanish had a privileged business position now and wanted to preserve it before a genuine transition began, at which time American businesses would be expected to come in and wipe the Spanish off the map. Leyva said she is writing a scathing article for publication with an independent outlet.

Comment: We saw a report that claimed debt restructuring as an objective of the Spanish visit. The "El Pais" correspondent has commented to us that too tough a policy from Madrid tends to rattle the Spanish businessmen here, and that even Aznar softened his policies somewhat after the businessmen complained. End Comment.

-- Jorge Oliveira, a released political prisoner, told COM April 3 that he would expect the GOC, "As part of the deal," to release a number -- 10, 20, even 30 -- political prisoners in the days/weeks ahead, but none of that would address the fundamental human rights problems in Cuba.

-- Aurelio Bachiller (independent labor leader) was not even called by Sandomingo. He told us that if he were, he would have complained that Spanish companies conspire with the Cuban government to abuse Cuban workers--paying them slave wages and denying them bargaining rights.

15. (C) Non-Spanish Europeans were almost completely shut out of this visit. According to Czech Charge d'Affaires, Vit Korselt, there was no pre-visit huddle or consultation with the EU embassies represented in Havana. They found out the same time the public found out about the Moratinos visit. Both Korselt and Slovak DCM Jurkevic believed that the Cuban government would release some small symbolic number of political prisoners, as a way to give the Spanish some tools to fight against post-trip resistance inside the EU. Jurkevic, to his credit, took part in the live video-conference that USINT and Embassy Bratislava organized on April 3, connecting Cuban youth dissidents with veterans of the 1989 "Velvet Revolution."

16. (C) Comment: Moratinos' visit causes considerable damage, both to US objectives in Havana and to the democratic opposition. For the Spanish foreign minister to make himself "a good friend" of the Cuban leadership provides the Raul-led clique with a sense of legitimacy and respectability that no amount of money from Hugo Chavez or investment from China could buy. We will work with the dissident movement here to help them magnify the impact of whatever grievances they air, and then look to the Department and our fellow embassies in EU capitals to work the Europeans to control the damage.
PARMLY